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ABSTRACT

Alternative assessments, also called authentic or performance assessments, have first the common notion of a meaningful performance or product. The use of such alternatives with students belonging to nondominant language and cultural groups is of interest because of the hope that this type of assessment can show what these students can really do and because of the fear that the inequities that are associated with traditional norm-referenced tests will recur. Negative consequences of traditional forms of assessment for students from nondominant cultural and language groups are well documented. Equity issues in the public debate on any assessment are consequential validity, gatekeeping, tracking, and the opportunity to learn. The social context of assessment must be acknowledged in the design of alternative assessments. The alternative-assessment approach is compatible with a constructivist view of learners. Some suggestions are offered for a culturally responsive pedagogy and assessment design. A particular focus is on portfolio use in the pluralistic classroom. Three tables and one figure illustrate the discussion. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

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Alternative Assessment: Issues in Language, Culture, and Equity

Elise Trumbull Estrin

Within the span of a few years, alternative assessments such as student portfolios, performance tasks, and student exhibitions have captured center stage among proposed education reforms. Also called "authentic" or "performance" assessments, these alternatives have at heart the common notion of a meaningful performance or product. The use of such alternatives with students belonging to non-dominant language and cultural groups is of enormous interest and concern for two principal reasons:

- the hope that alternative assessments will reveal what these students truly know and can do, and
- the fear that the same inequities that are associated with traditional norm-referenced tests will recur.

Although alternative assessments are being developed for widescale uses (such as statewide accountability), many educators believe their most attractive potential is at the classroom and school level. Unlike norm-referenced tests, these new assessments have the potential to inform instructional planning through assessment activities linked directly to students' learning experiences and to the contexts of those experiences — including the cultural contexts of a pluralistic student population. Other desired outcomes are:

- Students will be more intensely engaged as participants in their own learning.
- Student growth and achievement will be communicated more effectively to parents and community.
- Teachers will be stimulated to improve their teaching.

The current assessment reforms can be accomplished meaningfully only in tandem with access to high-level learning experiences for all students. If, indeed, *all* students are to benefit from reforms in assessment, specific attention needs to be paid to issues of equity and access for students from non-dominant languages and cultures — and not as an afterthought once reforms are in place for the "majority."

Finally, as Edmund Gordon, Emeritus Professor at Yale University, has observed, the core of equity in assessment lies in deep attitudes and values regarding the social purposes of assessment. In the past, the central purpose of assessment has been to sort and rank students according to presumed inherent abilities — in effect to create winners and losers. The current assessment reform movement represents a major shift in values toward using assessment to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and achieve at the highest possible levels.

Historical Context of the Reform

The negative consequences of norm-referenced test use for students from non-dominant cultures and language groups are well-documented. Despite psychometricians' efforts to address test bias, most such efforts have focused only on statistical or technical adjustment rather than on understanding the *root causes* of differences in performance or how to avoid *invalid uses* of tests — understandings that could guide systemic reforms.

Past attempts to reduce the cultural or linguistic load of tests by eliminating content that might be specific to any culture or by avoiding the use of language have not been very satisfactory. Pictorial or figural tests, for example, are limited in revealing what a student knows and can do. In addition, they, too, rely on skills or experiences that are culturally-based. It is in the context of these past failures to grapple with aspects of test bias that advocates for students from non-dominant linguistic and cultural groups look to alternative assessments with both hope and trepidation.

Equity Issues in the Public Debate on Assessment

Consequential Validity. In the current public debate about the new forms of assessment, concerns about their validity center at least as much on their use for making decisions about students and the consequences of those decisions (i.e., consequential validity) as on content and construct validity. A test can be said to be valid only if the way in which it is *used* is appropriate.

Gatekeeping. Some of the most serious negative consequences of assessment ensue from so-called "high-stakes" testing that determines program placement, certification, or graduation, for example. It is no secret that scores on ability and achievement tests are highly correlated with socioeconomic status and with the quality of schooling to which children have access. Tests thus compound the inequities endured by poor children by foreclosing to them additional learning opportunities.

Tracking. Disproportionate numbers of poor and minority students have long been tracked into low-ability classrooms and special education

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programs or disproportionately categorized as learning handicapped or language delayed on the basis of norm-referenced tests. Students in such classes do not get the opportunities to practice the kind of thinking associated with solving complex problems or exploring ideas — the kind of thinking called for in particular by many alternative assessments. And research shows that students placed in low-ability groups rarely, if ever, move into higher-ability groups. The damage to students can be argued to be lifelong, both cognitive and emotional, and even economic — in terms of missed opportunities.

Opportunities to Learn. The advent of alternative assessments offers an opportunity to re-examine the whole context of schooling, including what have been called "opportunities to learn." As long ago as the 1930s, critics of the use of norm-referenced tests with Spanish-speaking students argued that they were inappropriate on the grounds that those students were not receiving a *comparable education* (Sanchez, 1934) — that they did not have an equal "opportunity to learn." There are numerous recent studies documenting the effects of what has been taught (one index of opportunity to learn) on achievement (see Winfield, 1987).

It is clear that adequate opportunities to learn need to be ensured for assessment reform to be effective. But there is another consideration. It is apparent that even *equal* opportunity is not the perfect remedy to inequities; what works for some students does not work for others. The real challenge for schools is to be responsive to students' needs in ways that go beyond satisfying legal requirements or demands of public accountability to incorporating culturally responsive practices. Equal treatment may not ensure equal outcome. In fact, some educators caution that the wholesale rejection of instruction in basic skills penalizes students whose home experiences do not prepare them for the demands of school. For such students, a pure "process" approach to writing, for example, may be inadequate; and disciplined instruction in essential skills of writing may be complementary (Delpit, 1986).

The Social Context of Assessment

A Culture-Tinted Lens. Student performance on any assessment cannot be fully understood without reference to the language and culture of that student. "Culture" is used here to mean a group's systems of knowledge, values and ways of living that are acquired and transmitted through symbol systems. Assessment in any form is a communicative event (verbal and non-verbal), representing some set of cultural values and expectations. Test questions and student responses are understood only in terms of the test-taker's background, the testing context, and the cultural lens of the test developer and scorer. (What counts as "intelligence," for example, is so culturally variable that a single test of it cannot be valid for all people.)

Different Social Realities. Not all non-dominant cultural and linguistic groups function similarly in the larger society. Because of differences in their histories, they may have different views of social reality (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). These differences are reflected in the ways students interact in the classroom. "Involuntary minorities," such as African Americans and American Indians, may find themselves opposed to identifying with the dominant group, a stance which would interfere with their full participation in the classroom. In such groups, cultural and linguistic differences may be regarded as "symbols of identity to be maintained" (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991) rather than barriers to surmount, as many voluntary immigrants view their own cultural and linguistic differences. If, indeed, students' investment in learning and performing is compromised by social identity conflicts, test scores will most surely not be indicative of their ability.

Cultural Conceptions of Assessment. Cultures vary in their methods of teaching and assessing children, both in informal (home/community) and formal settings (school). In the past, research has shown that students from the dominant culture have more "test-wiseness" than their peers from non-dominant groups. But knowledge of and attention to how to pace oneself on a timed test or eliminate unlikely answers are only superficial indices of a more fundamental awareness of the meaning of assessment.

In American schools, it is accepted practice to examine students at steps along the way to mastery of a skill or performance. There is an assumption that "trial and error" is a good strategy that can work for everyone, that successive approximations with feedback from a more competent model represent a good way to learn. This approach is in stark contrast to the way competence is demonstrated in many cultures. For example, in the Navajo culture, a child observes until fairly sure he can do a task without error (Deyhle, 1987). Children receive non-verbal instruction in the form of adult modeling. At home, they learn privately through self-initiated self-testing, and they decide when they are ready to be examined. Navajo children may then be ill at ease if pushed into a premature performance. Among some other American Indian communities as well, failure to learn is considered a private act to be ignored in public (Philips, 1983).

It should not be surprising that research with Navajo elementary students has shown them to develop a school-congruent concept of *test* years later than non-Navajo peers (Deyhle, 1987). By the second grade, while non-Navajo students understood tests to be important learning events that would have consequences for their academic futures, Navajo students still did not.

Even with improved testing, we cannot escape the fact that the very concept of displaying one's competence via formal, often public, assessment according to a prescribed timetable will continue to be incompatible with community practices for some students.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Language, Culture and Learning. "Cultural mismatch" is often invoked by educators as the cause of some students' poor school performance vis-à-vis the dominant culture's norms — which are seen as objective standards to be met. Although overt claims of genetic inferiority and cultural deprivation have largely given way to these more neutral assertions about cultural discontinuity or difference from the dominant culture, the language used to talk about the needs of culturally non-dominant students often belies a belief that they are handicapped by their own culture and background — that they

are ultimately responsible for their own lack of success in school. Teachers may regard the "culturally different" child as having inappropriate attitudes toward learning, lacking the necessary experience for school success, and possessing inadequate language skills (DeAvila & Duncan, 1985). In addition, they may blame parents for not valuing education for their children, though parents' educational backgrounds do not provide them with the knowledge of how to help their children in ways valued by the school.

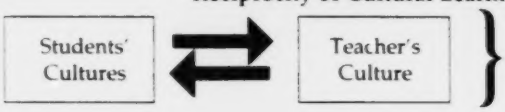
Another assumption underlying much of past testing has been that ability is immutable, some mix of heredity and environment that is virtually fixed by the time the child comes to school. To the contrary, considerable research has shown the reality of "cognitive modifiability," i.e., that children's learning — indeed, what we have called intelligence" — is responsive to experience.

Invidious assumptions like those above have paradoxically rationalized the provision of lower-level instruction; proponents argue that such students need instruction in basic skills before they can engage in higher-order thinking. Actually, research has shown that higher-order thinking is linked to successful learning of even elementary levels of reading, math, and other content (Shepard, 1991). However, as long as a language other than English and "different" cultural practices are viewed as obstacles to learning rather than assets, the learning potential of many children will continue to be underestimated.

Most educators and many parents share the belief that all students need to learn the ways of the dominant culture to survive in society. However, when other ways of knowing and learning are not capitalized on in the classroom, student strengths are ignored, and bridges that might have been built across cultures remain unbuilt, boundaries reinforced — to use common metaphors (Olsen, 1989; Gallagher, 1993). Moreover, culturally-dominant students and teachers are thus deprived of new ways of understanding themselves and others.

Cultural difference is not situated in particular students, of course. Where one sees difference is relative to where one stands; and all social groups are ethnocentric or communicentric, viewing their own ways of behaving and talking as "normal" and appropriate benchmarks by which to judge others' different behaviors. Though the expectation is that students from non-dominant groups need to accommodate to the dominant norms, if cultural accommodation is necessary, it should be reciprocal and result in a synthesis of cultures (Banks, 1988). Figure 1 illustrates this two-way relationship.

Figure 1
Reciprocity of Cultural Learning



Adapted from Banks, 1988

Social-Constructivism: Learning, Instruction and Assessment

The alternative assessment approach is compatible with a "constructivist" view of learners, more student-centered than teacher-centered, with its emphasis more on learning than on instruction. Students are seen as active constructors of knowledge, engaged in thinking — not just building skills hierarchically from simple to complex. One "constructivist" orientation often cited is *social* constructivist. Learning is portrayed as a social act in classrooms (and in the community), rather than as a set of strictly intrapersonal psychological processes.

From this standpoint, knowledge itself is conceived of as socially constructed, not a set of objective givens; and access to knowledge is affected by social factors. The meaning of "social" is not merely "interpersonal"; rather it implies that learning takes place within a larger context (the society) that entails differential status for different class, ethnic or cultural groups, as well purposes for schooling that reflect the values of dominant groups. These factors influence what goes on in the classroom — consciously or unconsciously — including the nature of the curriculum, how it is taught, how students are invited to participate in their own learning, and which students are expected to perform well.

Alternative Assessments, Language and Culture

This section presents a more in-depth look at the role of language and culture in instruction and assessment and offers suggestions for "culturally-responsive pedagogy" (Villegas, 1991).

Language Demands of School — Instruction and Assessment. Language is the primary medium of instruction in schools, and even with "multi-intelligence" instruction and assessment, it will continue to be necessary for all students to develop a high level of language proficiency — the ability to use oral and written language to communicate, think critically and create new ideas. Complex problem-solving — even in mathematics — is highly dependent on language. Although visual tools and manipulatives can aid students in solving problems, it is usually through language that students represent problems to themselves. And good solutions depend in part on these representations. Moreover, instruction and assessment as conceived of in current reforms make greater demands on language proficiency than do traditional approaches — something that can make assessment even more daunting for English learners.

Students need to be proficient not only in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar but proficient with particular academic uses of language. Before coming to school, children learn the language uses their communities value through thousands of interactions over a period of years, but the uses chosen are culturally variable. School uses of language are mirrored in dominant culture homes and communities to a

Table 1
Assessment Activities and Their Language Demands

Sample Assessment Activity	Potential Language Demands
Write a report for a friend who was sick today explaining to her the science experiment you did and how you did it. (Third-grade writing task following a classroom science experiment.)	Recount a multi-step past event, sequencing and reinterpreting information; assume role of teacher to a non-present audience. Requires considering what recipient already knows, level of detail she needs to comprehend.
Tell us anything else about your understanding of this story — what it means to you, what it makes you think about in your own life, or anything that relates to your reading of it. (Segment of an elementary reading assessment.)	Give account of own experience(s), linking to text, elaborating story comprehension.
You are a statistician in a political campaign. Design a poll, construct a graph, and analyze data in various forms regarding voter preferences and characteristics. Advise your candidate on a campaign strategy. (Synthesis of an eighth grade mathematics assessment.)	Obtain/select necessary information, recount information through multiple representations, interpret and explain; summarize conclusions.
Imagine that you are a staff writer for a small magazine. One day you are given your "big chance." . . . You are asked to write the final scene of an incomplete story. (Taken from a 12th-grade writing task.)	Complete an account (a story) following prescribed format; comprehend/analyze story so that new segment makes sense. Take on voice of another author, maintaining style.

Tasks are adapted from examples provided by the California Department of Education and the Arizona Student Assessment Plan (The Riverside Publishing Co., 1992). All entail additional context in original but are synthesized to highlight language demands.

much greater degree than in culturally non-dominant homes and communities, giving dominant culture students an advantage in the classroom.

Unlike social uses of language, school uses tend to be abstracted from context — *decontextualized*. One example of decontextualization of language is formal written text: here the reader must supply some context from his/her own background knowledge and knowledge of how texts "work." However, even classroom routines like "show and tell" in which students are expected to talk about past or future events in a prescribed format require use of decontextualized language. The speaker must gauge what listeners need to know to understand his/her presentation, in the absence of immediate context.

Students are often asked to create a story, recount past events, summarize material they have read, explain why they solved a problem as they did, or display their knowledge in a structure considered logical. There is an accepted "formula" for responding to all of these demands — a map for the structure of discourse to be produced (called "discourse genre"). When asked to summarize a passage, the student is expected to do so in a way that follows a specific pattern. For many children entering school, there is minimal fit between language uses and genres they have learned in their home communities and those that school requires. Table 1 gives some examples of the kinds of assessment tasks students may be faced with and their associated language demands.

Cultural Variability. Even when school and community language uses overlap, the formula for the corresponding genre may vary markedly. For example, though storytelling is apparently universal, what counts as a story varies from culture to culture. Some prefer topic-centered stories which are characterized by structured discourse on a single topic that assumes little knowledge about the topic or characters on the part of listeners. Others prefer topic-associating stories, which are characterized by structured discourse on several linked topics with considerable presumption of shared knowledge on the part of listeners.

Expository styles are also culturally variable. The dominant (European-American) written expository style is a linear one. In the linear expository style, an idea is introduced, supporting evidence is given, and conclusions are drawn; or events are related in time sequence. When a contrasting holistic/circular style — in which many parallel topics are developed at once — is used by students from non-European cultures, such as Asian, Pacific Island or American Indian, teachers may simply judge their discourse to be disorganized (Clark, 1993).

Methods of argumentation in support of certain beliefs also differ across cultures. Some Chinese speakers prefer to use a format of presenting supporting evidence first, leading up to a major point or claim (in contrast to topic sentence and supporting details). Non-Chinese speakers have judged them to be "beating around the bush" (Tsang, 1989). Unlike European-Americans who use "rational" style in argumentation, some groups freely incorporate emotion and personal belief to seal an argument — and find the former disingenuous (Kochman, 1989, speaking of White vs. Black style). Performance assessments often ask students to state their own views, supported by evidence. It is easy to imagine how students grounded in various communicative/discourse styles might approach such a task differently. In the same way, teachers from different cultural backgrounds could be expected to respond differently (and perhaps unfairly) to students' culturally varied styles.

Classroom Communication Structures. Classrooms have distinctive interpersonal communication patterns. The traditional communication structure is the "recitation script" (Mehan, 1979) (See Table 2). Certain features of the "recitation script" conflict with the communicative style of some students.

For example, domination of talk by a single person (the teacher) is alien to some American Indian students (Philips, 1983). In many Indian communities, a person is expected to address the group rather than a single individual. One-to-one exchanges in the presence of others, as when the teacher asks a single student a question and he answers only to her, are culturally discordant. It is also usual for a speaker to choose when to speak and to speak as long as he/she needs to, thus having more control over his/her own conversational turn. Indian children are often characterized as "quiet" by their non-Indian teachers; yet it is apparent that to participate in the recitation script they may have to violate numerous rules of communication as they know them.

When the communication conventions of the classroom are so different from those that students know, students may fail to participate in "appropriate" ways. Informal assessment via questioning may reveal very little about what students know.

Alternative Strategies. The recitation script is not compatible with the goals of current reforms in instruction and assessment, nor is it compatible with principles of good instruction for English learners or for many students from culturally non-dominant communities. To move away from the recitation script, teachers can:

- Give students more opportunities to take an active role in classroom discourse.
- Allow for variety of ways of participating in classroom discourse. (Students need latitude to select how they will participate. Variation makes learning opportunities more equitable.)
- Increase collaborative learning activities. (Student-to-student communication will increase. Small-group projects in which students work independently allow students to speak at their own determination.)
- Encourage students to use their language of choice in small-group work, if a group is linguistically homogeneous.
- Allow opportunities for group response from students, versus focusing on individual students.
- Encourage students to learn from each other in group discussions, and give evaluative feedback to the group, rather than to individual students.

(These last two strategies will be particularly effective for some students, such as American Indian and Hawaii Native.)

Teachers' direct knowledge of the communication styles and patterns of their students' particular communities is critical to their making decisions about appropriate instructional and assessment strategies. There is no catalog of cultural characteristics that can safely be applied to any group (all American Indians, all African-Americans, etc.) for three reasons: 1) there is great variability among people within any cultural group; 2) cultures are not frozen in time but continue to change; and 3) contacts with other cultures cause change within a group.

Moving Toward Equitable Alternatives in Assessment

Table 3 lists some of the most compelling and widely-mentioned criteria for valid classroom assessments, many of them recommended by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA. We have focused on classroom assessments here; additional criteria (such as transfer and generalizability and cost-effectiveness) would be more applicable to widescale alternative assessments, although they are of some concern in the classroom.

Assessments used for widescale accountability (e.g., state assessments) will also, necessarily, be less curriculum-linked, less flexible in form, and may offer less opportunity for self-reflection — particularly if students are not allowed to see them after they are scored. For these reasons, as mentioned earlier, many educators believe that the greatest potential for best use of the alternatives discussed here is in the classroom.

Table 2
The Recitation Script

Basic pattern:

Teacher *initiates* communication → Student *responds* → Teacher *evaluates* student response

Features:

- Teacher regulates virtually all talk (including topic; who talks, when, and for how long) Teacher can interrupt or re-direct talk to another student.
- All talk is mediated through the teacher, i.e., students do not talk to each other or to the whole group (except when called upon to give accounts).
- Students do not evaluate or elaborate on each other's responses.
- Teacher is transmitter of knowledge; students are receivers.

One alternative that many educators believe extremely promising for all students is portfolio assessment. If used well, portfolios can meet the criteria for valid, culturally-sensitive assessment. (See Box on page 7.)

Some Recommended Steps to Equity

Although the concerns about ensuring equity for students from non-dominant languages and cultures run deep, there are many positive steps that can be taken to begin to address them. Perhaps the first is to cultivate an attitude toward diversity that moves beyond characterizing students from non-dominant cultures and language groups as inferior (an assimilationist approach) and toward a true commitment to equality of outcomes for all students— a more pluralistic approach. The following are some elements of an agenda for equity in assessment.

Table 3
Criteria for Valid Alternative Classroom Assessments

- are curriculum-linked
- are flexible (form, administration, interpretation)
- reflect opportunities to learn (fairness issue*)
- are cognitively complex*
- call on multiple intelligences
- are authentic (make real-world connections)
- are meaningful in themselves* (are learning opportunities)
- entail opportunities for self-assessment
- are culturally responsive/allow for variation in language, in cognitive and communicative style, and in beliefs and values
- integrate skills
- are used appropriately and are useful for the purpose for which they are designed (informing instruction)

* proposed by CRESST/UCLA

Attention to Evidence and Consequences. It is imperative that we have a clear rationale for assessing students via certain products and performances and for the ways we interpret students' performances. We must be vigilant at every step of the way for potential bias, looking at a student's behavior and background as well as test performance to justify interpretations of scores and how they are used. Messick (1992) calls this the "interplay between evidence and consequences."

In addition, we must be extremely cautious in interpreting inadequate performances of students who are still developing proficiency in English or whose cultures do not match that of the school. A low performance cannot be assumed to mean that the student has not learned or is incapable of learning what is being assessed.

Flexibility. A principal key to meeting the assessment needs of a diverse student population is a flexible approach. It should be possible to design assessments that allow for a wide variety of tasks to elicit a single response and single tasks that allow for a wide variety of response types, while maintaining standards. For example, there are many possible ways to assess a student's ability to apply linear measurement skills. A task that reflects a context meaningful to the student should be used; and if appropriate, the student can record her problem solution in writing *or* on audiotape.

Improved Teacher Knowledge Base. If culturally-responsive pedagogy is truly a goal, teachers must be provided with pre-service and in-service education opportunities to learn about issues of language and culture and how they play out in the classroom. The cultures of students should be considered when programs, instructional practices, and materials are designed or selected, so that students' ability to participate in schooling is maximized, rather than attenuated. This means going beyond infusion of multicultural content into existing curricula to the use of culturally-responsive instructional strategies. Teacher preparation and development should address:

- differences in communication and cognitive styles and strategies for promoting inclusion of all students in classroom discourse
- ways of evaluating the language demands of classroom tasks
- frameworks for understanding students' language proficiencies
- a repertoire of ways to group students and work with them
- ways of working with communities
- frameworks for understanding and strategies for intervening with status differences that perpetuate inequities of the larger society in the classroom
- the role of teachers' own languages and cultures in shaping their world views and cognitive and communicative styles as well as their understandings of student performances
- opportunities to develop deep knowledge about particular cultural communities

Collaboration with Communities. To understand students' classroom performance, teachers need to learn from their local communities what is valued and how it is taught (Nelson-Barber & Mitchell, 1992). Therefore, community members should be included in decision-making about educational goals and assessments and their uses. Linking with the community will be crucial — to see communication patterns firsthand, to understand from parents what they value and why, to learn about how children perform at home, and to share with them a "school perspective." As change occurs, ongoing dialog with parents is vital to gaining their support — something that ultimately affects students' investment in the classroom.

Use of Multiple Sources. As Anastasi (1990) has cautioned, we must beware of using a single assessment score to make decisions about a student. What is needed is a range of assessments administered at different times throughout the school year. Students' performances on different tasks — even within a subject area — can vary considerably, and they change over time. Portfolios have been suggested as a desirable method of unifying in one place multiple indices of student performance that have been gathered over time.

Attention to Student Motivation and Interest. Often overlooked are *conative* variables having to do with motivation and interest — variables that affect learning outcomes. For example, personal interests lead people to seek certain experiences, which in turn contribute to the development of certain aptitudes. Conative information may be particularly important in understanding the performance of students whose cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant culture of the school. Their interests may diverge from what is available to them in school, and they may have developed skills in areas unknown to teachers. Such skills, however, could be linked to school experience by a sensitive teacher.

Other reasons that students may not be motivated to perform at peak capacity include conflicts in social identity and local conditions such as peer dynamics within a single classroom. In addition, some (as in the Navajo example cited) may not understand the meaning of "assessment" or "test" as construed by the school and thus may not be motivated to invest necessary effort.

Mediation of Assessments. Administration of assessments may be mediated in a number of ways: by increasing the amount of time given to complete them, by repeating or rephrasing instructions, by explaining the meaning of terms, by allowing the use of adjunct materials or classroom tools (dictionaries, calculators, etc.), or by translating portions of an assessment into a student's first language.

Translation. Translation is itself a form of mediation of text, between one language and another. Translating an assessment into a student's first language is a positive step. The more that students' first languages can be drawn upon (and maintained and developed) the greater the benefit to their learning. However, assessment translation is a source of many psychometric problems. There are no perfect equivalents across languages; and one is really translating across cultures as well. Some languages, like Spanish, have many dialects. Determining where the overlap of dialects lies so as to produce a translation comprehensible to most speakers of the language presents a considerable challenge. As the American Educational Research Association's Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing notes,

> "Psychometric properties cannot be assumed to be comparable across languages or dialects. Many words have different frequency rates or difficulty levels in different languages or dialects. Therefore words in two languages that appear to be close in meaning may differ radically in other ways important for the test use intended. Additionally, test content may be inappropriate in a translated version" (AERA. . . . ,p. 73).

Other aspects of text such as length may be affected by translation. Perhaps most fundamentally, construct validity is jeopardized with translation, i.e., it is not clear with a translated test that one is still testing the same presumed underlying abilities or knowledge. For all of these reasons, translation has to be regarded as a partial solution only.

Moderation. Moderation is the process of teachers' collectively evaluating student performances so as to ensure that the same standards are being applied. Teacher exchange of scored or graded student work offers the opportunity for teachers to check their interpretations of assessments against those of peers — something that could be particularly valuable in fostering discussion among teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

Portfolios in the Pluralistic Classroom

Student portfolios are structured collections of student work gathered over time, intended to show a student's development and achievement in one or more subject areas. They are process tools through which teachers and students evaluate student work together. Portfolios offer:

- Linkages to classroom experiences and students' personal experiences
- Flexibility to include products in any language or in any form (e.g. tapes, written pieces, drawings, photographs), experience-sensitive tasks, modified to suit student needs; student-chosen activities
- Developmental portrayals of student progress, using multiple measures at frequent intervals
- Self-evaluation opportunities for students
- Parent participation opportunities
- Opportunities to contextualize student performances (annotation)
- Program coordination support (when students have more than one teacher)

A Caveat and Some Recommendations

For portfolios to function well for English learners, in particular, teacher annotation is crucial to understanding the full context in which a performance was obtained. Annotation may include:

- explanation of why an activity was selected by teacher and/or student
- information on how much and what kind of teacher support was given; which teacher strategies were helpful
- notes on how the student completed a task, including successful student strategies, amount of time required
- information on difficulties the student had in completing a performance
- observations on the student's expressed feelings while engaged in an activity
- observations about the student's use of language and choice of language (English, other than English)
- the student's own written or dictated commentary about the meaning of the activity of his/her performance
- parents' commentary

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